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India-Pakistan: The Ground Forces Balance Along the Border [REDACTED]

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India maintains a significant numerical advantage over Pakistan in troops, tanks, and artillery pieces either stationed along or readily deployable to its 2,300-kilometer (km) western border. The Indian edge is significant in that it allows New Delhi's forces to maintain a credible forward defense against a possible Pakistani attack and still marshal an armored strike force to invade Pakistan. Most forces are deployed close to the border in Kashmir, where both sides believe the greatest likelihood for military operations exists. Southern Punjab or the northern Thar Desert could also become an active combat theater as an invasion route for an Indian armored thrust into Pakistan. Somewhat fewer forces are stationed on the border in Punjab—an economically important and heavily fortified region. The fewest forces are stationed farther south in the Thar Desert and Rann of Kutch. [REDACTED]

War Plans

The past three Indo-Pakistani wars have begun in the west with Pakistani thrusts into Kashmir. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] current Pakistani war plans center on an attack into the same region to sever the Pathankot-Jammu road. If successful, this attack would cut off Indian forces farther north in Kashmir from overland resupply and reinforcement. This offensive would be followed by secondary attacks across the line of control farther north to seize territory against the weakened Indian forces. Pakistani plans also call for a forward defense of Punjab and, farther south, protecting the rail lines running north from Karachi from Indian attacks that, if successful, would cut off Pakistan from its only major port. Pakistan maintains a small reserve force of one armored division and one armored brigade about 175 km from the Punjab Plain-Thar Desert sectors to help forward units in defense or blunt an Indian penetration. [REDACTED]

The Indians plan to mount a forward defense all along the Indo-Pakistani border, particularly in Kashmir near the Pathankot-Jammu road where they expect a Pakistani attack, [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] the Indians also would mount a limited preemptive attack from the Pathankot-Jammu sector to disrupt the expected Pakistani attack against the road. At least some of India's reserve forces—two armored, one mechanized, and one infantry division, along with one armored and one parachute brigade, stationed about 200 to 600 km behind the Punjab-Rajasthan border sectors—are probably earmarked to aid those defenses that buckle under Pakistani attack and then lead the defenders in localized offensives should the tide of battle turn. [REDACTED]

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The major Indian offensive, however, would be launched south of Kashmir against Pakistan's north-south rail line, [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] This attack would probably be launched from southern Punjab or northern Rajasthan and be spearheaded by those reserve forces uncommitted to defense. Without these reinforcements, Indian forces on the Punjab-Rajasthan border are not strong enough to launch a major thrust into Pakistan but can conduct localized attacks. [REDACTED]

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Forces and Terrain

India has about a 3-to-1 advantage over Pakistan in troops and a 2-to-1 advantage in tanks and artillery pieces either stationed on the border or readily deployable to it from reserve formations. Because India plans to conduct a forward defense, most of these forces are spread along the border in relatively fixed positions, dissipating their numerical advantage. Along critical border sectors where fighting is most likely, the two sides are roughly equal. India's major advantage lies in its large armored reserves, which can shore up a sagging defense or spearhead an attack in greater strength than Pakistan's forces could marshal. Terrain impediments and logistic routes near the border are important to the force balance and are major determinants of how and where the two armies will operate. [REDACTED]

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Kashmir. More forces are deployed opposite each other in Kashmir than along any other part of the Indo-Pakistani border. The Indians have only a slight advantage in manpower and are inferior in armor to the Pakistanis in this sector. Eight Indian infantry divisions, three armored brigades, and one infantry brigade face one Pakistani armored division, six infantry divisions, one armored brigade, and three infantry brigades, with virtually all units on both sides deployed forward. This high concentration of forces reflects the anxiety both countries share over the boundary here. Most of it is not a permanently recognized border but a line of control settled after the 1971 war and susceptible to being redrawn along the cease-fire line of a future conflict. Despite India's overall advantage in armor along the border, Pakistan maintains an advantage in armor in the Kashmir sector in order to launch the type of quick strike [] to cut the Pathankot-Jammu road. India has deployed its infantry formations forward, even raising two divisions this year and stationing them along the road between Pathankot and Jammu, to blunt this attack and contest every inch of territory. []

Except for a few northern passes, only southern Kashmir from Pathankot to Jammu offers a transborder route suitable to large-scale military operations. As a result, except for isolated infantry clashes farther north, most heavy fighting in Kashmir probably will occur near the Pathankot-Jammu road in southern Kashmir. The road at some points runs as close as 4 km to Pakistan and is the only land resupply route linking Kashmir to the rest of India. It, therefore, is critical to India's northern defense. The rest of the Kashmir border is dominated by northwest-southeast mountain ranges, some among the world's highest, with an arctic climate most of the year. Few major roads exist on either side of the border, and traffic is mainly restricted to unpaved roads, tracks, and trails that usually are passable only in summer. []

Punjab Plain. South of Kashmir, the Indians and Pakistanis deploy roughly equal forces opposite the border in Punjab—four Indian infantry divisions, two armored brigades, and one infantry brigade face four

Pakistani infantry divisions, one armored brigade, and two infantry brigades. These forces are insufficient for large-scale offensive operations without significant reinforcements but can maintain the credible defenses both armies are planning against localized attacks. Most of these units are deployed forward, and both sides of the border are heavily fortified. []

The Punjab Plain is flat, temperate, and generally suited for military operations—including cross-border offensives—all along its length. This agricultural heartland of both countries contains numerous population centers and, especially in Pakistan, north-south running rivers and canals that restrict maneuvers and slow advances. These impediments are thinnest in the southernmost part of the sector. The most extensive transportation networks along the border are found here, including four of Pakistan's important north-south rail lines, which greatly facilitate logistic support as well as offering key objectives to attacking forces. []

Thar Desert. This border sector is less defended than the two northern ones. Three Indian infantry divisions and two armored brigades are stationed 100 to 500 km behind the border. Two Pakistani infantry divisions are deployed closer to the border, along the north-south rail line between Sukkur and Bahawalpur. []

The sparsely populated, flat-to-rolling Thar Desert straddles a virtually open border. Heat, loose sand, and lack of water and transportation routes create oppressive conditions for military operations, especially in the summer. Although few logistic routes approach the border on either side, the critical Pakistani north-south rail corridor is potentially vulnerable here. Only a single line connects the port of Karachi with Pakistani Punjab with no water obstacles between it and the Indian border. Still, the Indians would have to cross at least 150 km of open desert from their nearest bases before contesting Pakistani control of this line. []

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Previous Indo-Pakistani Conflicts

1947. Within months of partition, the new states of India and Pakistan clashed briefly over control of the predominantly Muslim state of Jammu and Kashmir. New Delhi airlifted in troops to subdue local Muslims who were contesting their Hindu ruler's decision to join with India. Pakistan sent forces into Kashmir along the northern roads to Srinagar, the capital of Kashmir, to aid the revolt, and the Indians responded with overland and airlifted reinforcements. The Indians succeeded in pushing back the Pakistanis after sharp fighting near Srinagar, and the conflict was officially ended in 1949. Both sides agreed to a UN-monitored cease-fire line, which left India in control of two-thirds of the state. (U)

1965. Following years of inconclusive and frequent flareups along the disputed Kashmir border, Pakistan began sending armed infiltrators across this border to subvert Indian control. When India moved to seal the border, sharper clashes led to an attack by two Pakistani infantry brigades, with some armor support, against Jammu to seize and hold this important link on the road between Kashmir and the rest of India. The Indian defenses there held, and they eventually advanced with one armored and two infantry divisions. The Pakistani defenses stiffened in this sector with the introduction of an armored and two infantry divisions. Farther south, two Indian infantry divisions had been launched along the transborder Punjabi routes against Lahore, which the Pakistanis defended with one infantry division while attacking the Indians' flank with an armored division. The Indians lured this division into a trap and virtually annihilated it. With both sides reaching exhaustion, fighting died down. International

diplomatic pressures and Indian concern over threatening Chinese troop movements led to an agreement by both sides to withdraw their troops and restore the status quo. []

1971. The Indians initially conducted mainly defensive operations on their western border, turning to the offensive after they subdued Pakistani forces in East Pakistan, now Bangladesh. The Pakistanis bombed Indian airfields and shelled Indian border defenses in Kashmir before launching ground attacks against Kashmir along the northern passes and against the Pathankot-Jammu road. One Pakistani infantry division with some armored support pushed the Indians back just north of Jammu, but the Indians' defense firmed and they pushed the Pakistanis back from this attack and elsewhere along the Kashmir border. The Pakistanis made some gains in the Punjab border sector along a wide front, which were partly offset by Indian counterattacks. Indian advances in southern Kashmir and northern Punjab created a pincer movement around a Pakistani salient, which the Indians attacked and eliminated with a heavy loss of Pakistani armor. In the Thar Desert, Indian counterattacks against Pakistani paramilitary incursions along the border took Indian troops 16 km into Pakistan. A stand by Pakistani infantry blunted the Indian advance, and this southern front, too, drifted into limited shelling and desultory small unit actions. The two sides signed an agreement the next year to withdraw their forces behind the border in the south and establish a line of control in the north, generally along the cease-fire line. []

Rann of Kutch. This coastal lowland extending from the Thar Desert to the Arabian Sea is the least guarded of any section of the Indo-Pakistani border and is poorly suited for military operations. One Indian infantry division is stationed about 150 km from the border on the eastern limit of the 450-km-wide wasteland of mangrove swamps, mud flats, and salt marshes, while one Pakistani infantry

division, one armored brigade, and one infantry brigade are at the western end. These forces maintain at least some military presence near the border and, in Pakistan's case, hold Karachi against a possible amphibious or airborne assault aimed at closing the port. []

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We believe the initial centerpiece of a future Indo-Pakistani war would be a battle over the Pathankot-Jammu road. Only a strong surprise attack by the Pakistanis in the north has any potential to make much headway. India's chances at blunting this attack, and perhaps mounting a counterrattack, would increase significantly if it committed some of its reserves in this area. If the Indians retain control of the Pathankot-Jammu road, they will probably be able to fight the Pakistanis to a standstill in the rugged terrain farther north—although even the smallest Pakistani gains here would mean a net loss of Indian territory when a new line of control is drawn.

Southern Punjab offers the most likely route for India's planned armored strike. Pakistani rail lines here are close enough to the border so that even limited success by the Indians would constrict enemy support operations, as well as leaving the assault force well positioned to continue the attack or swing north or south against vulnerable Pakistani flanks.

Although this attack would involve crossing some water obstacles, we believe the Indians are preparing for just such an eventuality by acquiring tactical bridging equipment and using it in training maneuvers. India's large Brass Tacks IV exercise in 1986 centered on the tactical bridging and crossing of a canal in the Rajasthan training area. Pakistan's armored reserves would have a good chance of blunting such an attack but would be hard pressed to contain the Indians should they choose to redirect the offensive. The channelized avenues and heavy fortifications of most of the rest of Punjab probably preclude much ground being seized.

It is also possible that India would launch its armored attack across the northern or central Thar Desert against the weakest link in Pakistan's rail net. Not only would the Indians face no water obstacles, but a successful interdiction of the line would leave the Pakistanis with no fallback rail lines connecting

Karachi with the north. The Indians would face enormous problems attacking across this wide stretch of desert with no roads to support their extended logistic lines. Also, any achievement less than cutting the rail line would leave the Indians having squandered critical armor on insignificant terrain.

Pakistan's armored reserves would still have a good chance of blunting an attack across the desert and leaving the Indians with fewer options than farther north for redirecting the offensive.

the Pakistanis are conducting maneuvers in the Thar Desert that we believe involve defending against a simulated Indian attack in that area. This suggests that, although the Pakistanis do not consider an Indian attack across the Thar Desert likely enough to station troops there, they consider such an attack threatening enough to practice a defense against it.

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